SOUNDING PRESIDENTIAL IN THE MODERN ERA: RHETORICAL SHIFTS FROM THE NOMINATING CONVENTION TO THE WHITE HOUSE

An Honors Thesis

Presented to the Honors Program of

Angelo State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for Highest University Honors

BACHELOR OF ARTS

by

Donald “Trey” Dean Moore III

May 2015

Major: Political Science

SOUNDING PRESIDENTIAL IN THE MODERN ERA:

RHETORICAL SHIFTS FROM THE NOMINATING CONVENTION

TO THE WHITE HOUSE

by

DONALD "TREY" DEAN MOORE III

APPROVED:

Dr. Deanna J. Watts, Chair
Assistant Professor of Political Science

Dr. Anthony Bartl
Assistant Professor of Political Science

May 8, 2015
Date Successfully Defended and
Approved by Advisory Committee

APPROVED:

Dr. Shirley Eoff May 15, 2015
Director of the Honors Program

ABSTRACT

This study sought to extend research on presidential transitions and the rhetoric used during that time period. It pooled three speeches from eight different presidents and analyzed the rhetoric used therein. Speeches were put into the text-to-image software *Wordle*, giving a displayed and analytical representation of the speech. Then, speeches were coded for several variables, including the tone of certain rhetoric and the frequency of policy mentioned in each speech. The results of this study showed that while the nomination speeches and victory speeches all employed fairly similar in rhetoric, State of the Union speeches given by each president was unique to their own transition and rhetorical style, and often times focused on specific policy goals of importance to the individual president rather than the party to which they belonged. This shows the institutional nature of the presidency but also indicates that presidents add their uniqueness to the office.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The United States Presidency is an exclusive club that has developed different styles of governing throughout its existence. However, a transition from president-elect to the president in office is a rough and unique journey for each president. During this transitional time period, the incoming president attempts to build relationships with the bureaucracy, signal their national policy priorities, and through a series of public appearances and speeches, build upon his public support as he steps into his new role. Part of the duty of the president is to make appointments and staff decisions. However, this cannot be done until the president is inaugurated and in office. Therefore, the formal tools of policy-making are not at his disposal during the transition period (Crothers, 1994; Smith, 2010). He must resort to rhetorical appeals during his transition in order to garner support for his national policy goals (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011). During the transition, relationships are built, decisions are made, and the next presidency, despite it not being official, begins far before inauguration.

During the transition, the president must begin to act as a spokesman for the incoming administration's policy goals. In order to accomplish his objectives, the president-elect must gather support for his programs in order to make the transition go as smoothly as possible (Crothers, 1994; Burke, 2001; Kumar 2008). While the president does select his cabinet and officials for the policies he plans to pursue, the real power of the president depends upon the public's emotions (Nelson & Riley, 2010). While this has not always been realized, the

growth of the radio and television media forced presidents in transition to be politically and rhetorically savvy in order to advance their policy agenda before actually taking office (Crothers, 1994).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three important changes in American politics shape the way this interaction between the president-elect's rhetoric and the public functions (Burke, 2009; Stuckey, 2010). Mass media technology, campaigns, and the modern doctrine of presidential leadership all alter and shape the specific way that the transitioning president uses rhetorical appeals to the public (Burke, 2009; Stuckey, 2010; Stromback & Kiousis, 2011). These intertwine to form the "Rhetorical Presidency," an idea that the president must use the media and nationally broadcasted speeches as platforms for the advancement of national policy goals in order to gain public support and put pressure on other areas of the government (Crothers, 1994; Stuckey 2010; Hart, Childers & Lind, 2013).

The presidential transition from out of office into inauguration occurs in three stages: the Early Transition, Middle Transition, and the New Presidency, or Final Transition (Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994). The Early Transition is premised on the president's promise of governmental continuity. This period is difficult for the president-elect because challengers to the newly elected administration arise and question the new Chief Executive's ability to lead and run the country (Stuckey, 1992). According to Stuckey (1992), the president must use rhetoric to define his position as the most legitimate successor, and consequently establish his right to said succession. Succeeding presidents tend to rely on their predecessors' legacies. Unfortunately, this rhetorical tool can backfire as they shroud themselves and may unintentionally create expectations that will be difficult to meet (Stuckey, 1992; Hart, Childers & Lind, 2013).

The Middle Transition is a period in which the presidents do away with some of the reliance on the previous administration and slowly start to create rhetorical support for their own agenda (Stuckey, 1992). This step in the transition process places the incoming Chief Executive in a state of limbo, where the president must distance himself from his predecessor's legacy while still acknowledging the previous administration's successes and failures. This can be challenging if the previous administration was either extremely successful or extremely unsuccessful, especially if the incoming president is of the same party as the outgoing administration (Crothers, 1994; Kumar 2008). Each president during this part in the transition must find the adequate balance between using the previous administration to bolster appeal and using rhetoric to boost confidence in his own policy goals and aspirations (Stuckey, 1992; Burke, 2009; Hart, Childers & Lind, 2013).

The Final Transition is, as its name implies, the final stage in the presidential rhetorical transition. The new president is becoming accustomed to the new demands of the Oval Office and his respective responsibilities. The previous president is now a figure in history, no longer the prominent rhetorical tool. In this stage, the desire of public approval for legitimacy is set aside by the need to demonstrate elements of leadership ability (Stuckey, 1992; Smith 2010; Olson et. al., 2012). This shift becomes apparent by the State of the Union address, as the president is able to give a speech outlining specific policy goals and on a national stage where Congress, the bureaucracy, and the American Public are listening attentively (Stuckey, 1992; Nelson & Riley, 2010). This provides the best opportunity to create a unique yet profound identity for the new administration and its political rhetoric (Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994). All of these stages set up the Rhetorical Presidency, where

the acting president gives rhetorical appeals through speeches in order to gain public support and put pressure on Congress to pass his policy agenda (Ceaser, Thurow, Tulis, Bessette, 1981). With the emergence of television in the modern era of politics, presidents in transition are able to use this strategy before they even get into office. This strategy extends beyond the modern era, though. Franklin D. Roosevelt and subsequent presidents used the strategies described by Tulis (1987) before they stepped foot in the Oval Office.

Franklin D. Roosevelt is the first example cited by scholars of a president-elect using rhetoric tools throughout the transitional period to boost policy support. Crothers (1994) contends that FDR pledged to completely alter the relationship between the American public and government (Crothers, 1994). FDR ran his campaign on this idea of "interdependence" (Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994). Roosevelt made the point that the electoral mandate meant that the national government is responsible for creating decent lives for all Americans (Crothers, 19494). Therefore, he believed that the president-elect deserved programmatic support because the election results gave him a mandate to make changes in the American political system (Crothers, 1994; Burke, 2009). Most important to the overall development of this transition in the presidency is that FDR used rhetorical devices to further his support and adoration coming into office, mostly through public addresses and speeches (Crothers, 1994; Kumar, 1992; Burke, 2001). FDR was able to create a situation where the president-elect, in situations where the president-elect is out of party, can use rhetoric to assert that the current party is harmful for politics and the American way of life and that reform and new beliefs should take their place (Crothers, 1994).

Scholars also point to this practice under the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower (Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994; Burke, 2009). He won an election that used rhetoric that placed individual freedom as the single most important political virtue, and it became the core principle of his political program (Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994). Eisenhower used rhetoric as a tool to put forth the idea of this American freedom and sought to create a unified American ideology against the communist regime across the ocean (Crothers, 1994). He went as far to say that it was not only an American duty, but also a moral duty, to keep individual freedom as the most important virtue in life. He continued his rhetoric by introducing the fear of communism into his speeches during this transition period, so that when he stepped into the Oval Office, he could aid in mass deregulation and the elimination of the bureaucracy (Crothers, 1994).

John F. Kennedy's transition used rhetorical appeals for the claim that Americans were obligated to sacrifice personal interests for public good, and the result would be an improved country in the face of adversity (Crothers, 1994; Burke 2001). Kennedy even invoked Jonathan Winthrop when saying that the personal sacrifice to fulfill duties would cause America to be "a shining city upon a hill" (Crothers, 1994).

President Nixon made promises to use the government to keep the average American citizen's best interests at heart (Crothers, 1994). Nixon argued, prior to being in the Oval Office, that the American people were all individually hard-working and good, and the Government should be trusted to fulfill its duties toward the American People. He seemed to understand that a politician in transition must communicate with six different publics: voters, the party, other candidates, interest groups, contributors, and arguably the most important,

the media (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011). His emphasis on trust during his transition proved costly rhetorically, as deceit and lies brought down his presidency (Crothers, 1994).

Carter ironically found himself in a similar rhetorical situation as his predecessor, Nixon (Burke, 2001; Kumar et. al., 2000). Just as Nixon suggested, the American leaders, not the American people, had lost respect for law. As such, it was important for the newly elected Carter to begin using rhetoric to help establish a newfound trust in his presidency (Crothers, 1994). Carter's rhetorical use appealed for support and claimed that he understood how to behave decently, and therefore deserved the trust and support of the American People. He argued before he ever stepped foot in the presidency that his era would be one of trust and equality, not of unlawfulness and deceit (Crothers, 1994).

Ronald Reagan promised to alter the relationship between Americans and their government (Crothers, 1994; Walker & Reopel, 1986; Stuckey, 2010). Crothers (1994) argues that all of Reagan's predecessors assumed that the government could positively affect the lives of the ordinary citizen. Reagan began a wave of a new era of conservatives who believed that the government should just keep out of the lives of the individual American because it was just making matters worse. Reagan and most of his predecessors had in their transition a claim of an electoral mandate, i.e. one should support him because he was elected, as support for his programs (Crothers, 1994; Walker & Reopel, 1986). Reagan also used rhetoric that sought support on the grounds that the programs that he wanted to implement would lead to prosperity for all Americans, not just one social class. The idea that government was the problem, not the solution, was an ideological and rhetorical tool that

aided Reagan in his transition to the presidency. The unifying of the American public through his rhetoric made his transition successful (Crothers, 1994; Stuckey, 2010).

Bill Clinton's transition, more akin to the pre-Reagan presidents, centered on the rhetoric that the government could be used to improve the lives of ordinary citizens (Crothers, 1994; Burke, 2009; Kumar, 2008; Lovvorn & Walker, 2011). Clinton's rhetorical appeals during the transition were slightly different than the others mentioned in the study, as Clinton bashed the Republican Party for holding the government hostage to the forces of greed (Crothers, 1994, Lovvorn & Walker, 2011). The rhetoric used by Clinton echoed the late President Kennedy, as he argued that sacrifice would ennoble the American people as a whole and cause the country and the public to achieve their goals. Clinton's transitional rhetoric is exemplified most profoundly by the statement that, "there is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America." (Crothers, 1994, p. 810). Scholars argue that the general transition phase of the presidency is similar amongst the presidents in the 20th Century (Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994; Burke 2009; Lovvorn & Walker, 2011). These transitions are important because they allow the brief time period between president-elect to acting president to embody the change in ideology that is manifested in regime shift, regardless of how large or small (Crothers, 1994).

Burke (2009) approaches the contemporary presidency by analyzing the Obama administration and its respective transition. He finds that the Obama transition into the presidency was extremely important due to the unique circumstances. Obama had entered the presidency as the first president since Richard Nixon to take office during a war, and faced an economic crisis that is comparable to that of Franklin D. Roosevelt when he took the

presidency (Burke, 2009; Stuckey, 2010; Olson et. al., 2012). Burke points out that transitions began to be more planned out under Jimmy Carter's transition in 1976.

Carter started working on a transition plan for the presidency following the Pennsylvania primary in April (Burke, 2009). With Reagan, steps were taken in late 1979 and escalated in spring of 1980, after his nomination was secured (Burke, 2009; Olson et. al., 2012). George H.W. Bush followed in his forerunners' footsteps by starting to formally plan for the potential presidency after he won the nomination. Clinton did likewise. However, George W. Bush decided to start in the spring of 1999, much earlier than his predecessors (Burke, 2009; Stuckey, 2010; Olson et. al., 2012). President Obama and his associates followed Clinton's example, and started planning during the summer of 2008 for the transition into the presidency (Burke, 2009). Obama seemed to understand that it was extremely important to prepare early for the transition into the presidency, and that possibly helped him maintain a longer period of public support for his programs once in office. (Stuckey, 2010; Olson et. al., 2012).

TRANSITION RHETORIC AND PUBLIC POLICY

Presidential power is the power to persuade (Neustadt, 1990). This power extends beyond the Oval Office. During the transition from out of office into the acting administration, presidents can use their speeches during the Early, Middle, and Final Transitions to help push policy goals on Congress and the public (Stuckey, 1992). However, the specifics of the transition rhetoric remain blurry. This study seeks to expand upon the transition rhetoric research and how each president uses their ability to persuade and speak to the public. The concept of issue ownership holds that certain political parties will speak more about a specific policy area with which the public associates their party (Burke, 2009). For example, the Democratic Party will speak more about the environment, and the Republican Party will speak more about defense, because the public associates those issues with those respective parties. Issue ownership is important to the transition because the president is using rhetoric to establish himself as the leader of the country and the leader of the party to which he belongs (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011). Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study predicts:

> H_1: Speeches throughout the transition will adhere to issue ownership more often than not (Stuckey, 1992; Stromback & Kiousis, 2011; Hart, Childers & Lind, 2013).

In addition, the Final Transition is the period in which presidents try to firmly separate themselves from the previous administration (Stuckey, 1992; Stuckey, 2010). The State of the Union Address symbolizes the pinnacle of the Final Transition, and therefore it

can be used to analyze the rhetoric used during that period. The public usually disapproves of the previous administration, especially in cases where the outgoing party is different than the incoming one (Crothers, 1994). That brings this study to the next hypothesis:

> H_2: Mentions of the previous administration will occur more often than not, and they will take a negative tone more often than positive, as the incoming president will attempt to distance himself from the identity of his predecessor and capitalize on public approval rating (Stuckey, 1992).

The first hundred days of the presidency is the best window for passing policy goals (Burke, 2001). As such, the president in transition will attempt to ride the high approval rating into the presidency and put pressure on Congress to pass his policy agenda. Since domestic policy is easier to garner public support for than foreign policy, the president will use transition speeches to set a domestic political agenda for the incoming administration. As such, this study expects to see the following hypothesis:

> H_3: Speeches will mention domestic policy more often than they mention foreign policy, as the president attempts to capitalize on early approval ratings and set a domestic policy agenda (Nelson & Riley, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The data set this research draws on is composed of three speeches from the transition periods for each president from President Kennedy to President Obama. The data set excludes President Ford and President Johnson, as they did not have a transition as defined in this study. Since their predecessor left office before their term expired, they were the designated successor and therefore did not have the opportunity to campaign for the presidency and use campaign-style rhetoric during their transition period. The speeches chosen were the president's nomination acceptance speech at their respective party's convention/caucus, the victory speech given the night of the election after the candidate finds out the results of the election, and the first official State of the Union Address. Official State of the Union Address refers to the one categorized in the public records as the first State of the Union, not the first time the acting president addressed Congress.

Following Olson, Poe, Trantham, and Waterman (2012), this study plugged each of the speeches into the text-to-graphic software program *Wordle*. This software program allows for a display of the important rhetorical elements of each speech without portraying the whole document. We can then analyze the most important topics of each speech, as the most frequent words in the speech appears in larger size than the less frequent ones. The software excludes words like "and" and "I"; only words with significant rhetorical or political weight appear. Each speech is displayed in the appendices as reference. This qualitative element of the research allows for a broader

understanding of the rhetorical theme of each speech. Since the speeches analyzed include ones from the Early, Middle, and Final Transitions, the use of *Wordle* creates a more universally understandable analysis of the transition as a whole (Stuckey, 1992; Olson et. al., 2012). In addition to the qualitative analysis, this paper also coded the speeches for various variables in order to quantify the transition rhetoric for each president.

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study include the individual presidents and their respective stages of the transition process. The three types of speeches were coded as follows: 0 as the nomination acceptance speech given at the presidential candidate's party convention, 1 as the speech given when the president learned of his victory, and 2 as the first official State of the Union Address. Each speech was given a dummy variable of their party, with Democratic presidents coded as 0 and Republican Candidates coded as 0. The total sample size for the speeches used in this initial study was n=24. Since this study is an introductory study, the sample size is smaller than it would be for subsequent studies. Three speeches from each of the eight presidents provides a good perspective of how each president's transition used campaign-style rhetoric, along with giving a sample from each stage of the transition.

Dependent Variables

Each speech was tested for several variables. The month day, and year of each speech was recorded in numerical value but was not coded beyond that. The Congress

in session during the time the speech was given also was noted in this study, simply as the numerical value of the current group. For example, the 111th Congress would be entered as 111. The data set also included the location of the speech's delivery. In addition to the recording of the date and Congress, other variables were coded. Whether or not Congress is mentioned was coded, with no mention as 0, mention of the current Congress as 1, and mention of the upcoming Congress as 2. The tone of the mention of Congress is noted, with a negative tone coded as 0, positive tone as 1, mixed tone as 2, and neutral tone or no mention of Congress as 9.

Whether or not the speech mentioned the outgoing administration was a variable in this study. The speech was coded as a 0 if they did not mention the previous administration and 1 if there was a mention. Like the congressional tone, the tone of the previous administration's mention in the speech was coded. Negative rhetorical tone was coded as 0, positive rhetoric as 1, mixed rhetoric as 2, and neutral or no mention as 9. For example, in George W. Bush's nomination speech, he explains that the Clinton administration coasted through prosperity (Bush, 2000). This is an example of negative tone. However, sometimes the presidents would give a more positive spin on the previous administration, such as when George H. W. Bush talks about his loyalty to Reagan (Bush, 1988).

Policy was coded for each speech in several ways. First, if there is mention of economic policy, it was coded based on ideology. Economic policy that is generally more conservative, such as tax relief, tax code reform, increased child tax credit, and death tax repeal rhetoric was coded as 0. Liberal economic policy positions, such as

increased taxes in general, or rhetoric involving the top income earners paying their "fair share" were coded as a 1. If there was no partisan economic issue discussed in the speech, the variable was coded a 2. Similarly, social policy was coded based on ideology. Conservative social policy positions such as pro-life were coded as 0, whereas liberal social policy positions such as pro-choice or gay marriage were coded as 1. If no social partisan issue was discussed, it was coded as a 2.

In addition to identifying the ideological rhetoric present in each speech, this study also coded and quantified the number of times foreign policy and domestic policy were each mentioned in a speech. Only specific policy mentions were counted. Saying "taxes are too high" does not count as a policy position due to its extreme vagueness; similarly, "women deserve equal rights" is not counted but "pay should be equal for women" would count because it is a specific policy position. For foreign policy, this study included any mention of the military in a specific policy stance as foreign policy. Each policy stance is only counted once, even if it is mentioned multiple times throughout the speech. For example, if a president opens with a statement on military pay, and then brings up the same issue later in the speech, it still only counts as a frequency of 1 because the research only counts the amount of different policies mentioned, and therefore eliminates duplicates.

After the frequency of both foreign and domestic policy mentions were counted, the difference between the two was coded. If there were more domestic policy issues mentioned, it was coded as a 0; if there were more foreign policy issues mentions, a 1; and if there were an equal amount of both foreign and domestic policy positions

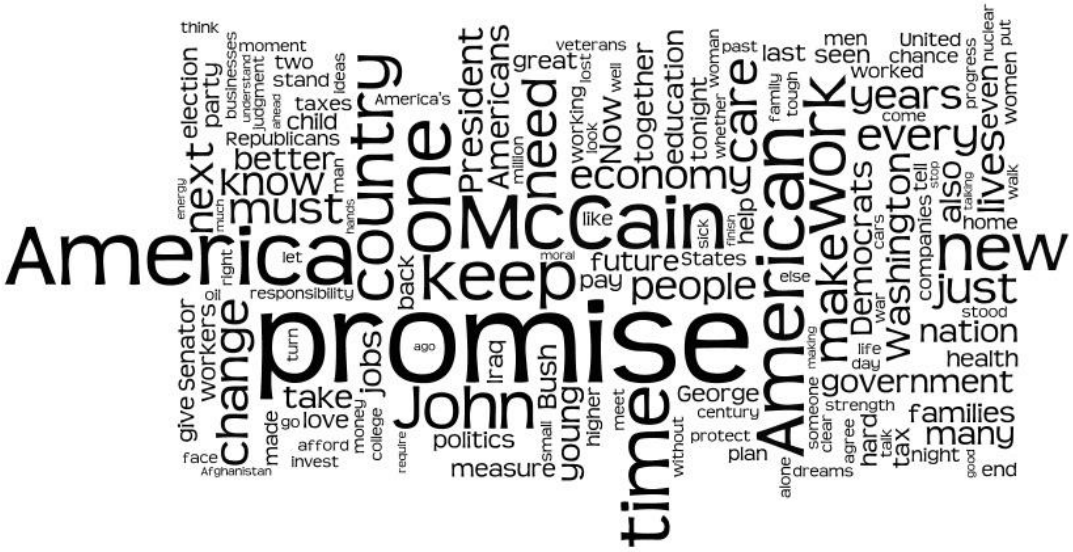
mentioned, a 9 was assigned. Lastly, the speech was coded for issue ownership. Issue ownership is when a candidate or politician speaks about an issue that is usually associated with a particular party, for example military pay for Republicans and the environment for Democrats (Hart, Childers, & Lind, 2013). If the speech did not adhere to issue ownership it was coded as a 0, a 1 if it did adhere to issue ownership, and a 9 if there was no mention of a policy specific to one party.

RESULTS

Wordle Analysis

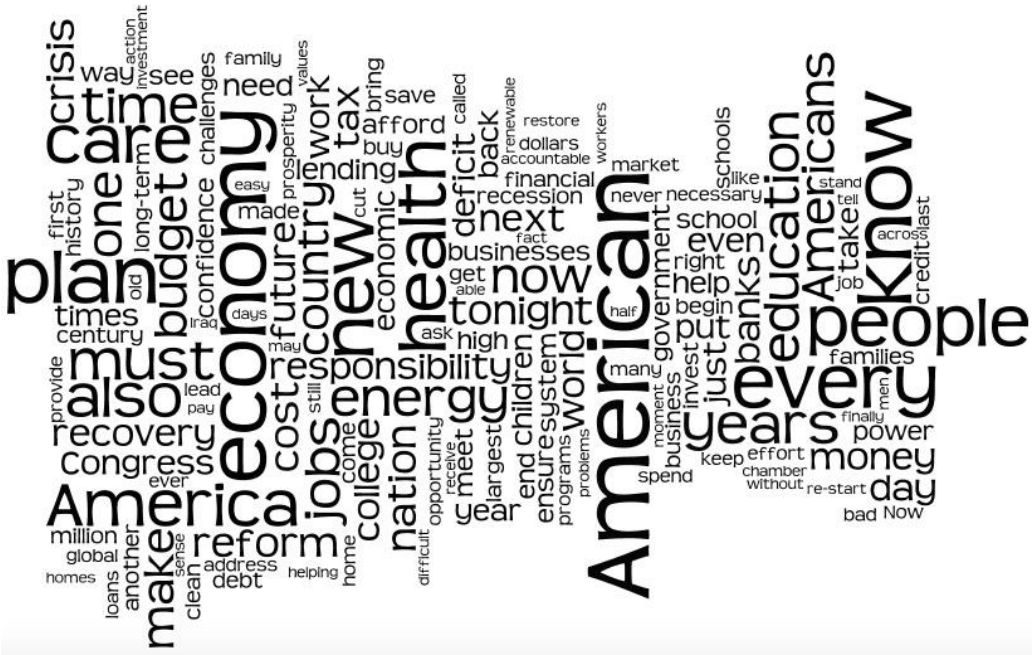
After the speeches were plugged into the text software *Wordle*, a better overall representation of the speeches' rhetorical styles became evident. The full list of the *Wordle* graphs can be found in Appendix A. The most rhetorically significant words came up larger in some instances, showing repetitive uses of the word. Some of the other words are smaller because they were mentioned less in the speech than their other rhetorical counterparts. This showed which subject matters the speaking transitioning president found to be important to repeat, and which ones played more of a filler role. Graph 8.1 illustrates the rhetorical significance of several words in President Obama's Democratic nomination acceptance speech.

Figure 8.1 Obama's Nomination Speech



Here, the key and most frequently used word "promise" signals the beginning of Obama's transition into the White House. He sought to separate himself from the prior administration by promising to be proactive with certain policies such as the economy and the job market. "Change," being the campaign slogan, was also an extremely popular word in the speech. However, this speech lacks talk about solid policy goals. The vague mention of the economy and the previous administration hardly counts as setting a policy agenda; rather, it seems to be more campaign rhetoric. This is most likely due to the partisanship and hype of the nomination speech. Below, Figure 8.3 shows how differently the first State of the Union Address from President Obama uses rhetoric in comparison to the nomination acceptance speech.

Figure 8.3 Obama 's First State of the Union Address



It seems that while the economy remains a primary issue for this speech, Obama abandoned the campaign rhetoric of "hope" and "change" and tended to focus on specific

policy areas such as education, healthcare, and tax reform. This is most likely due to the fact that the president must act as the leader of the whole nation when making the Final Transition (Stuckey, 1992).

This being said, not all presidents dropped their campaign rhetoric once they became acting president. Below, President George Bush's nomination speech and first State of the Union Address show similarities in their lack of substantial policy goals while maintaining a rhetorically heavy approach.

Figure 5.1 Bush 41's Nomination Speech

Figure 5.3 Bush 43's First State of the Union Address

Both speeches seem to put a priority on catchy campaign rhetoric such as mentioning the future and implying a sense of urgency with the word "must." However, it seems, from the *Wordle* charts, that the speeches lack a clear indicator of policy plans for the nation and rely heavily on the campaign-style rhetoric used in the Early Transition (Stuckey, 1992; Nelson & Riley, 2010). Not surprisingly, President Bush's son, George W. Bush, had a very similar-looking State of the Union Address when plugged into the software. Figure 7.3 shows the word "must" as the most frequently used word in his speech too. This seemed to be a trend amongst the modern presidents, as Kennedy, Carter, and George H.W. Bush all seemed to use the word "must" the most frequently in their State of the Union Addresses (Figures 1.3, 3.3, 5.3 respectively).

Not all presidents stuck to their campaign rhetoric by the time their State of the Union Address rolled around. Figure 8.3 illustrates that President Obama seems to mention a wide variety of policy goals, with an area of policy being the second largest word behind "American." Ronald Reagan was perhaps the most differentiated president in terms of

beginning rhetoric and setting State of the Union Address policy agenda. In Figure 4.3, Reagan seems to focus on government programs and how they are hurting the economy and wasting money. From what we know about Reagan's ideology, this seems to be in line with his campaign rhetoric, but stands on firmer ground than the messages given on the campaign trail (Walker & Reopel, 1986). This being said, every president seemed to follow a similar style of using more campaign rhetoric towards the beginning of their transition, while shifting to solid policy stances by the time they gave their first State of the Union Address.

Quantitative Analysis

While *Wordle* is an effective tool for illustrating the overall theme of one president's speech and rhetoric, it does not do a sufficient job of providing a larger view of the growth of transition rhetoric. After assigning variables to the speeches, this study compared the results of the analysis with the original hypotheses. This section does not include every chart from the study, however data not present here can be found in Appendix B.

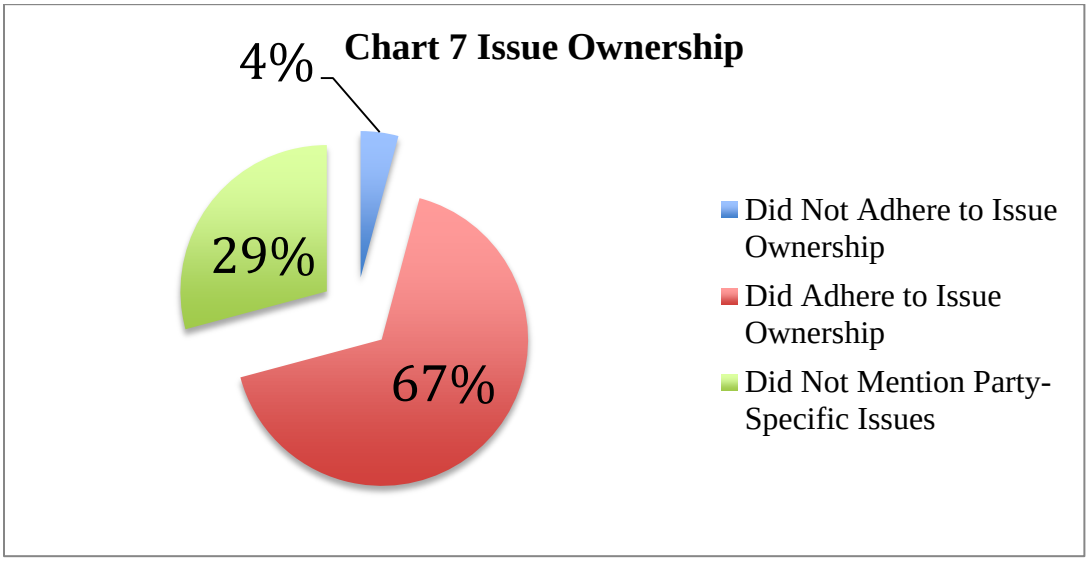


Chart 7 (pictured above) shows the breakdown of issue ownership among the sampled speeches. The fact that more speeches were in adherence to issue ownership than not affirms the hypothesis H_1 and show that presidents tend to mention issues with which their respective parties associate. This is an advantage for presidents in transition because it allows them to maintain a loyal public voter base while they transition into the presidency and lets them "own" an issue that they can always come back to when there is less to discuss or if they struggle with a particular policy area (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011). Only one of the twenty-four speeches did not adhere to issue ownership and went out of the way to mention a subject matter generally associated with the opposition party.

Previous Administration Rhetoric

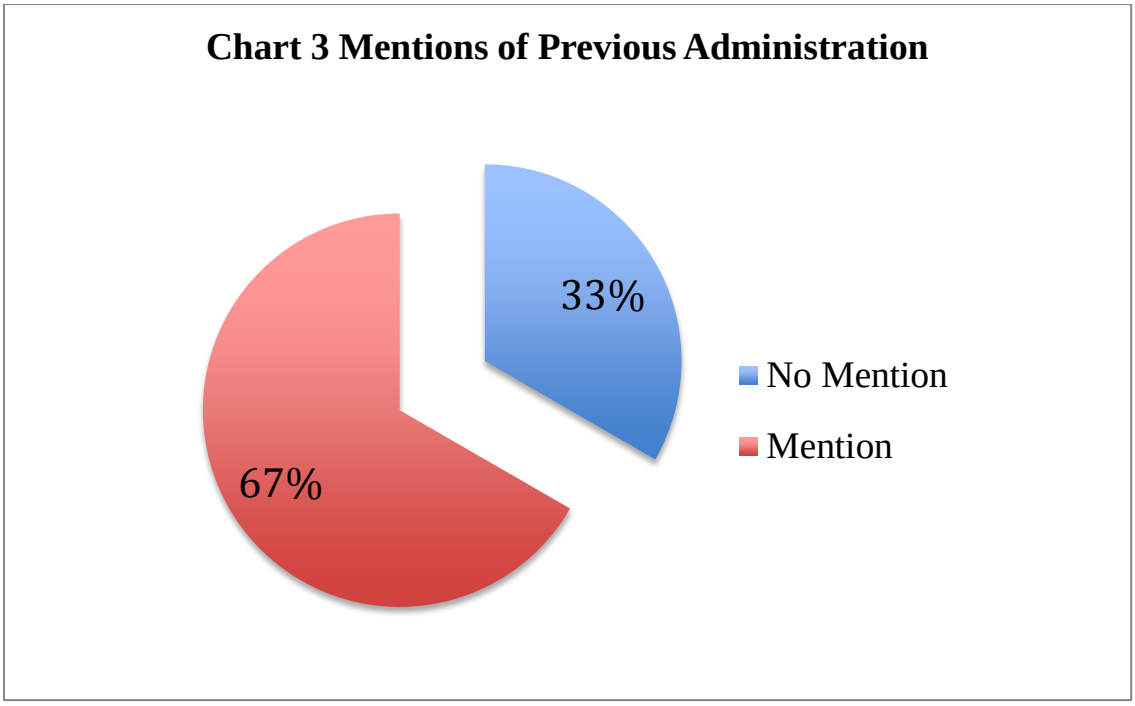


Chart 3 displays the ratio of speeches that did mention the previous administration versus speeches that did not. It is clear that of the twenty-four speeches sampled throughout the eight different presidents' transitions, presidents tended to mention the previous administration more often than not. Therefore, the hypothesis H_2 can be affirmed, that presidents use rhetoric that explicitly mentions the previous administration in their major transition speeches more than they do not mention the previous administration.

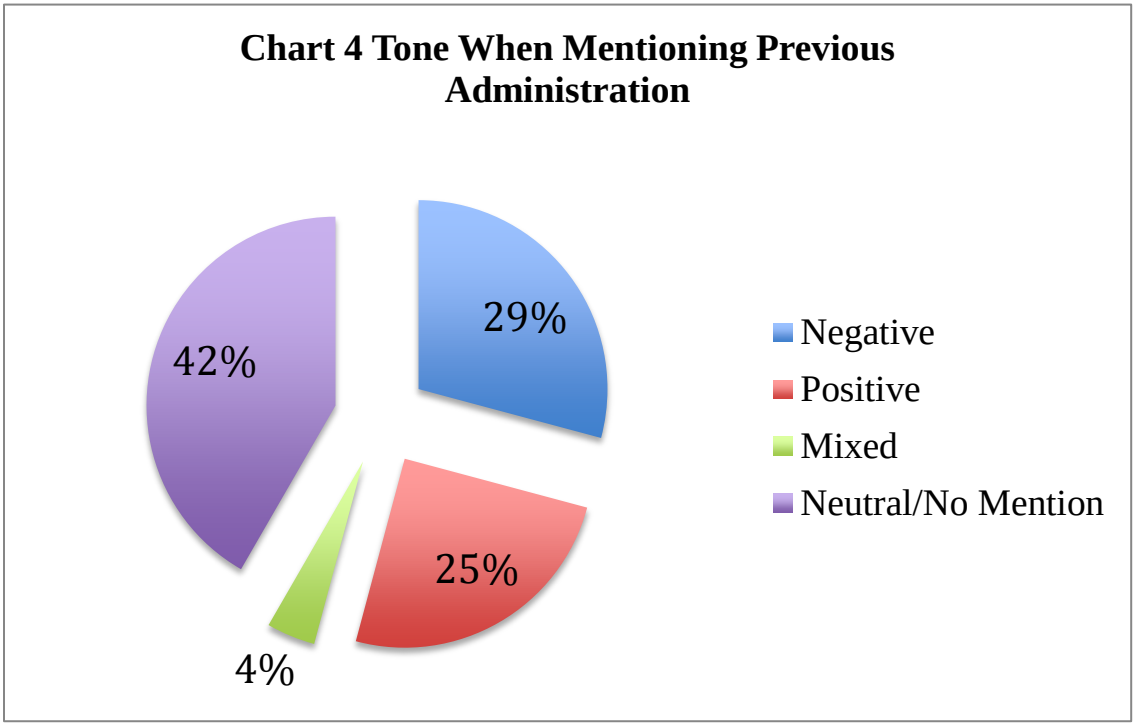
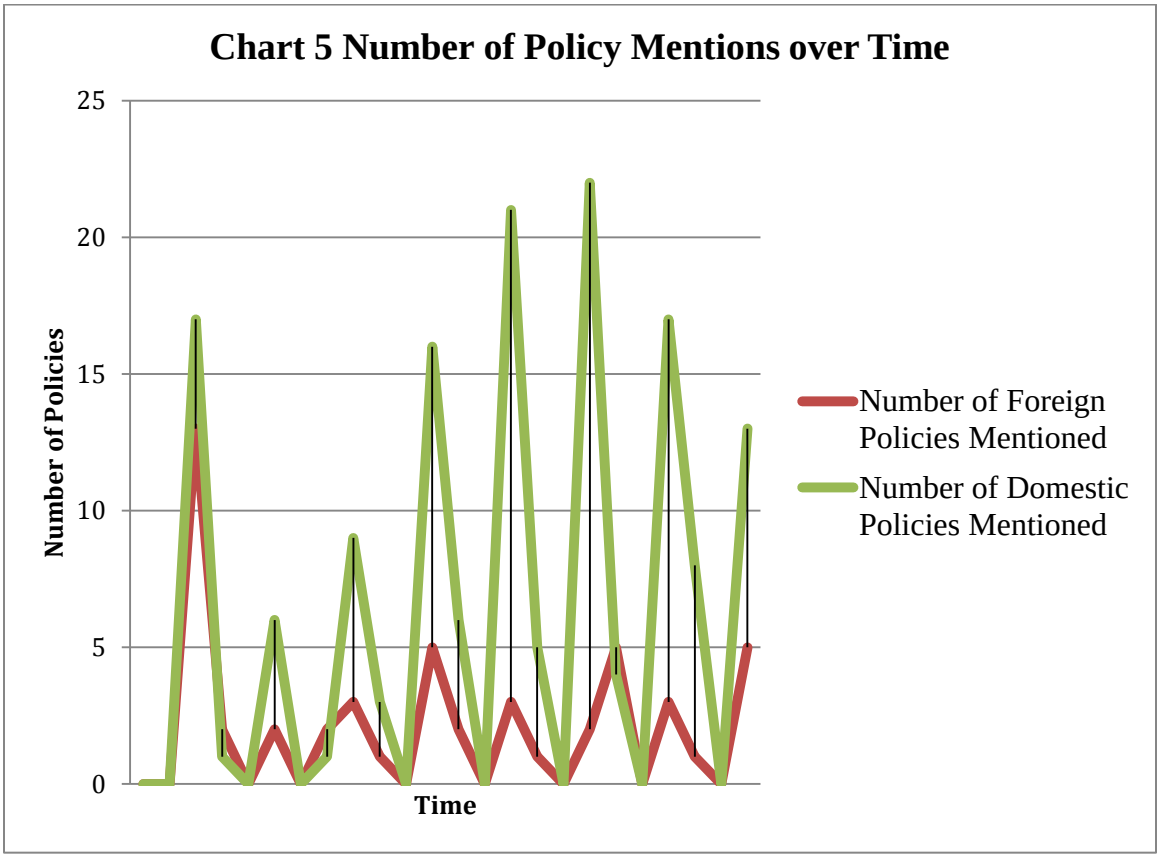


Chart 4 shows the relationship of tone and the rhetoric used when mentioning the previous administration. Presidents are fairly split in their rhetoric of the previous administration. This usually was due to party lines. Often, presidents would reference the "great" presidents of the other party in a good light, most likely to appeal to the other side of the ideological aisle. Nevertheless, this study only counted mentions of the administration that the president-elect was succeeding. When mentioning the prior president, transitioning

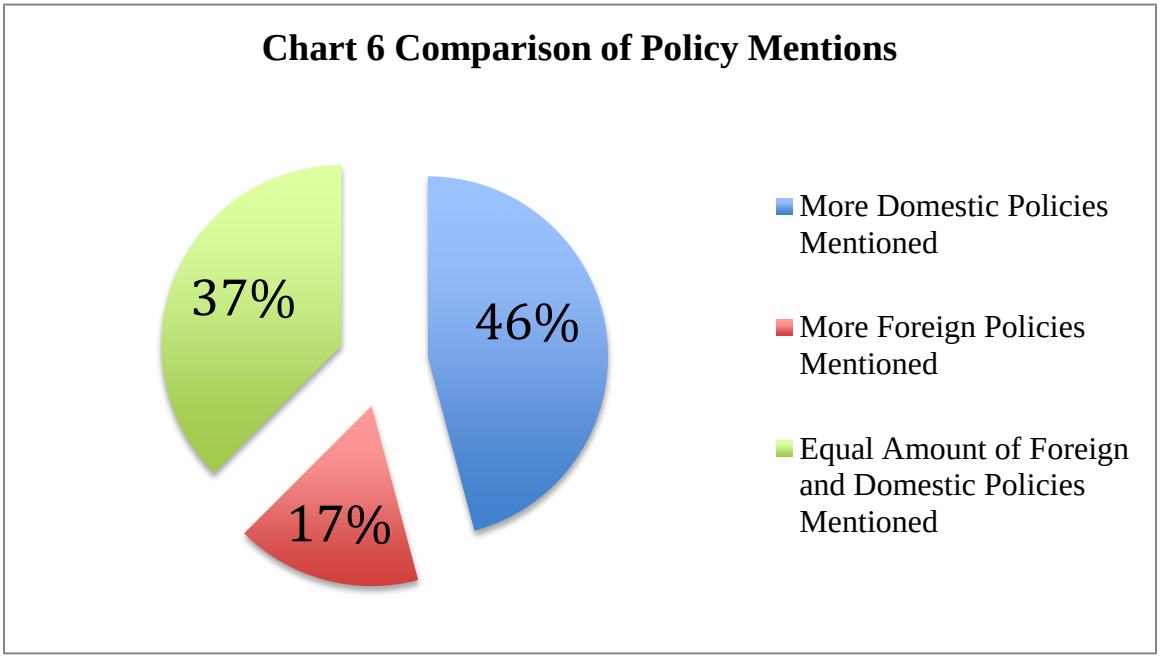
presidents usually tend to be more negative in their tone than positive. This variation is most likely due to the difficulty of transitioning into office when the previous administration was of the opposite party (Crothers, 1994). If the opposite party won, it usually meant that the previous administration had fairly low approval rating, and therefore it was beneficial for the transitioning president to use rhetoric that attacked the faults of the previous president, regardless of how legitimate the claims were (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011).

Transition Rhetoric and Policy



Presidents in transition must shift away from the mudslinging and campaign-style rhetoric used against opponents and focus more on public policy goals and gaining public

support for their programs (Crothers, 1994; Stuckey, 1992, Smith, 2010). As such, it can be expected that the president will speak more about policy the deeper into the transition he goes. Chart 5 is representative of that statement. The spikes in the number of policies mentioned are the State of the Union Addresses from each president. While some presidents spoke significantly less about policy than others, their State of the Union Address always had the most policy mentions of the three speeches sampled.



While the victory speeches rarely had any policy talk in them, the State of the Union Addresses and nomination acceptance speeches usually mentioned at least a few foreign and domestic policy stances. This being said, presidents generally spoke more about domestic policy than foreign policy, though it was still fairly close (within ten percentage points of one another). This affirms the hypothesis H_3, as domestic policy was the more heavily talked about policy area in 46% of all speeches sampled, whereas only 37% of the speeches talked about more foreign policy. It is unclear why domestic policy is talked about more than

foreign policy in general. It could be the availability of different domestic policy issues versus the narrowness of foreign policy, or it could have something to do with the complexity of being specific in foreign policy versus the relative simplicity of domestic policy. Either way, it is an interesting and statistically significant differentiation that occurs during the president's transition.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on the development of rhetoric throughout the transition period of the beginning of a new presidency. The original question arose from prior research that explored the different broad definitions of the transition period but lacked a clear understanding of how the transition used specific terminology or references to further policy agenda (Crothers, 1994; Stuckey, 1992; Stuckey, 2010; Burke, 2009; Olson et. al., 2012).

Despite the conclusions drawn from this study, considerable gaps remain in the study of presidential rhetoric, specifically the political tone and policy appeals used during the transitional period. This study sought to take the methodology from Olson et. al. (2012) and expand it to the transition period of more than one president using a graphical representation of the most frequently used rhetoric. In addition, this study expanded the qualitative methodology common in this field to a quantitative understanding to ascertain the accuracy of common assumptions about presidential rhetoric during the transition period, such as the frequent bashing of the previous administration or a lack of clear policy goals.

Past research identified the three stages of the transition: the Early, Middle, and Final Transitions (Stuckey, 1992; Stuckey, 2010; Crothers, 1994). This study expanded upon that central idea by taking one speech from each part of the transition and analyzing how the president's rhetoric changes between each speech and each transitional phase. The nomination speech is usually when presidents begin their administrative selections and make choices as to who is going to be in their camp moving forward into the presidency (Crothers, 1994). As such, the rhetoric of this time period seems to be more vague and partisan than the speeches given later in the transition. The nomination speech sets the tone for the whole

transition and often the viewpoints presented in the Early Transition are the theme for the incoming president and are expanded upon, rather than replaced, moving forward.

The victory speeches rarely spoke to any specific policy agenda. President Carter's victory speech was accompanied by a Q&A session, where he actually dodged a few questions regarding policy and gave extremely vague responses in the areas he answered. The other seven presidents in this study usually spent their Middle Transition speech thanking their supporters and some actually mentioned the transition explicitly, calling for support and patience. This was also the time where a president would never be negative toward the previous administration or their opponent. In the *Wordle* charts, "thank" appears as one of the most common words. The president attempted to cast aside politics and thank the campaign team on the win and offered little in terms of policy goals.

The State of the Union Address served as the most prominent speech for policy rhetoric and agenda setting (Nelson & Riley, 2010). The president generally strayed away from making negative statements about Congress and the previous administration and instead tended to focus more on his own national policy goals. Another interesting fact is that the presidents spoke more about domestic policy than foreign policy in their State of the Union Addresses. Since it is perhaps more difficult to be specific with the whole public on foreign policy than it is with domestic policy, the president perhaps remained cautious with his rhetoric and policy goals so people would back things based on a general statement without knowing the foreign affairs specifically.

The *Wordle* charts give a good understanding of the themes of each of the president's transition. They show that certain words or phrases became more important to the identity of

the president than policy goals themselves. As time went on, it seemed that the later presidents of the modern era focused more on developing a brand for their transition rather than garnering support for specific programs. Certain rhetorical styles, such as showing a sense of urgency with the word "must," seem to be prominent among the modern group of post-television presidents. They all used rhetoric describing the creation of a new identity for America. The Democratic presidents often identified their policy agenda as some sort of "The Great…" which was an obvious play on the New Deal and the Great Society from other successful Democratic presidents.

Republican presidents were more likely to blame the government than their Democratic counterparts. They explained the failures of certain programs and how they needed to be removed, while the Democrats talked about a void in public policy that needed to be filled. Almost every president talked about increasing job availability with the help of the federal government but also cutting the bureaucracy. While these two claims are obviously counterfactual and usually ended up never happening, the rhetoric was effective since it was so frequently used.

The results of the quantitative analysis seem to support hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, but with a disclaimer that more research is needed to know the depth and breadth of the rhetorical phenomenon. The transition serves as an opportune time for the incoming president to put their policy agenda on display while they are in the "honeymoon phase" of their political career as the president (Hart, Childers & Lind, 2013). As such, the president seems to only use vague policy references until he is actually in office, where he then uses the first State of the Union to mark the end of the transition and start his administration

officially by letting the bureaucracy, Congress, and the Public know what his policy goals are.

The research supports the idea that the presidency acts as an institution (Kumar et. al., 2000; Burke, 2009; Stuckey, 1992; Crothers, 1994; Smith, 2010). The presidents used in this study all seemed to follow a similar pattern of rhetorical transition. They all vaguely referenced certain "hot" political topics at their nomination, avoided political talk at their victory speech, and then used the State of the Union Address as an opportunity to push their policy agenda forward. This being said, the presidents each developed their own unique rhetorical style and prioritized different policies from their predecessors. Moving forward in 2016 and beyond, a similar rhetorical pattern will likely continue with the next president in transition.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Presidential transitions, while heavily studied, still require a great deal of research moving forward in this 21st Century. The development of social media could play a role in the reach of the transitioning president's rhetoric, which could perhaps shift the role of speeches to a more policy-focused area and leave the vagueness and hype to the social media outlets. Further research is needed to determine how certain campaign-style rhetoric affects public approval, and whether or not differences in rhetorical approaches between the different modern era presidents play a role in approval rating, or if the approval rating is roughly the same no matter what.

Another area of research that should be explored is the role of the bureaucracy and political appointments. The appointment of a high-ranking official can be used as a rhetorical tool to help gain support during the transition. A good example of this is President Obama's appointment of Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State very early on in the transition. This most likely helped boost approval rating among Democrats and helped unify their party.

Policy success is usually tied with rhetorical success. However, to what extent the rhetoric used in the transitional period affects the early policy agenda of the incoming president has yet to be explored. There is a lack of data on this correlation, if there is any. There is also the question of why presidents seem to favor talking more about domestic policy than foreign policy throughout the transition. A study could be done comparing the ratio of domestic to foreign policy in the transition speeches to the speeches given later on during the presidency. Perhaps it is not a phenomenon exclusive to the transitional period.

CONCLUSION

Presidential transitions not only rely on rhetorical usage to promote their policy agenda, but also to aid in their public image from campaigning candidate to the national figurehead. The Early Transition still focuses on building a solid campaign identity and uses rhetoric that separates the transitioning president from the outgoing administration (Crothers, 1994; Smith, 2010). This is exemplified by their nomination acceptance speech, where they generally adhere to issue ownership and are ideologically slanted toward their respective parties. These speeches tend to be negative toward the other party and the outgoing administration, especially in cases where the outgoing administration has low approval ratings.

This is followed by the Middle Transition, where the president has won the election and must begin making administrative decisions and selecting cabinet members (Crothers, 1994; Burke, 2009). The victory speech is used as the focal point of this period of the transition, and often avoids talk about policy and is also usually respectful to the outgoing administration. The president-elect will use rhetoric that starts to change their public image from the candidate to the leader.

Lastly, the Final Transition tends to focus on policy goals and rallying the public by the president's side during a high approval-rating period (Neustadt, 1960; Crothers, 1994). The State of the Union Address serves as a perfect opportunity for the president to make his policy agenda public and to solidify his own identity as the national leader. At this point, the president is seen as the leader of the nation and puts pressure on Congress to pass his policy goals while the public is on his side.

The important part of rhetoric during the transition is that it alters the image of the transitioning president from a campaigning candidate with grand aspirations to an acting president with a solid policy agenda. This then allows the president to move forward, if done successfully, into passing his national policies and establishing a firm foundation for the new administration.

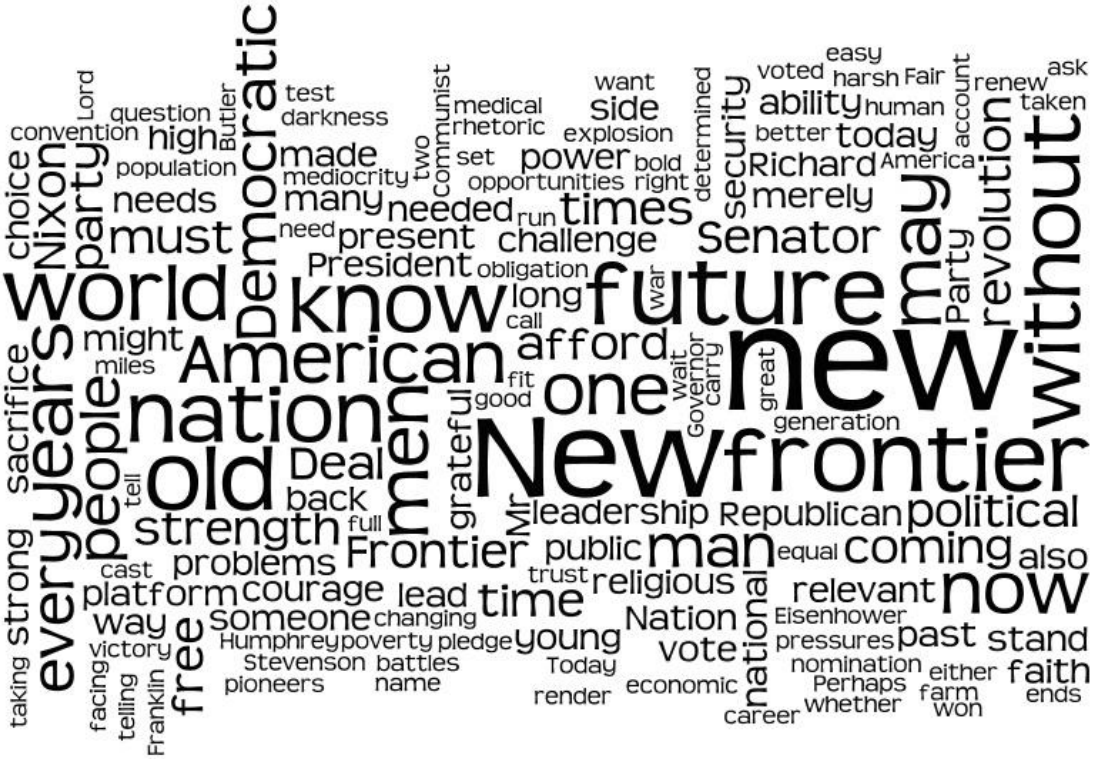
APPENDIX A

Table 1 Selected Speeches[1]

Kennedy	Nomination Acceptance Speech	7/15/60
Kennedy	Victory Speech	11/9/60
Kennedy	First State of the Union Address	1/30/61
Nixon	Nomination Acceptance Speech	8/8/68
Nixon	Victory Speech	11/6/68
Nixon	First State of the Union Address	1/22/70
Carter	Nomination Acceptance Speech	7/15/76
Carter	Victory Speech	11/4/76
Carter	First State of the Union Address	1/19/78
Reagan	Nomination Acceptance Speech	7/17/80
Reagan	Victory Speech	11/4/80
Reagan	First State of the Union Address	1/26/82
Bush41	Nomination Acceptance Speech	8/18/88
Bush41	Victory Speech	11/8/88
Bush41	First State of the Union Address	2/9/89
Clinton	Nomination Acceptance Speech	7/16/92
Clinton	Victory Speech	11/4/92
Clinton	First State of the Union Address	2/17/93
Bush43	Nomination Acceptance Speech	8/3/00
Bush43	Victory Speech	12/13/00
Bush43	First State of the Union Address	2/27/01
Obama	Nomination Acceptance Speech	8/28/08
Obama	Victory Speech	11/5/08
Obama	First State of the Union Address	2/24/09

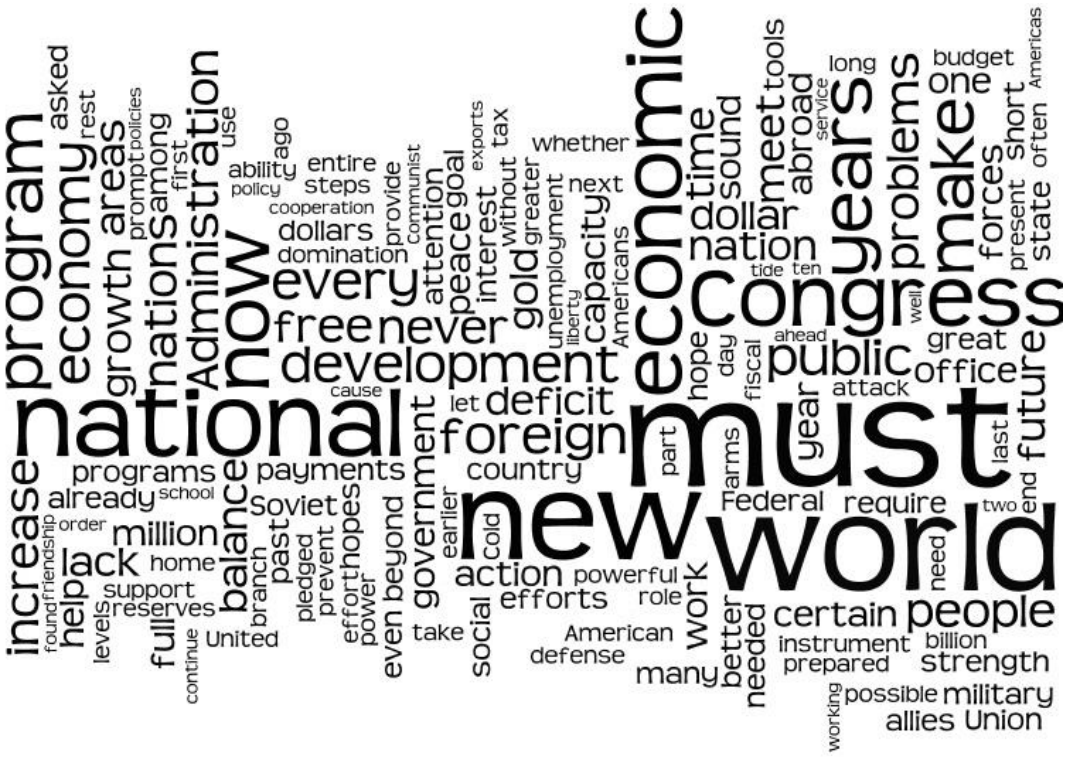
[1] President Ford and President Johnson were excluded from this study due to their lack of a transition period from the succession of their predecessor. Ford never had a Victory Speech or Nomination Acceptance speech as a president, and using LBJ's speeches from his second term would not fit the operational definition of transition speeches.

1.1 Kennedy's Nomination Acceptance Speech

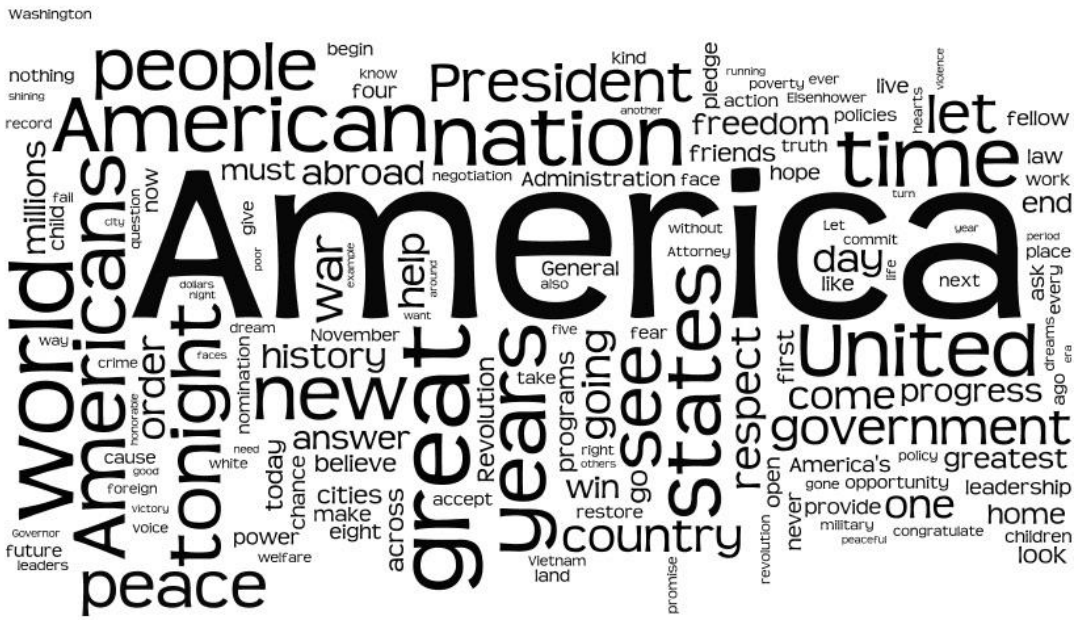


1.2 Kennedy's Victory Speech

1.3 Kennedy's First State of the Union Address



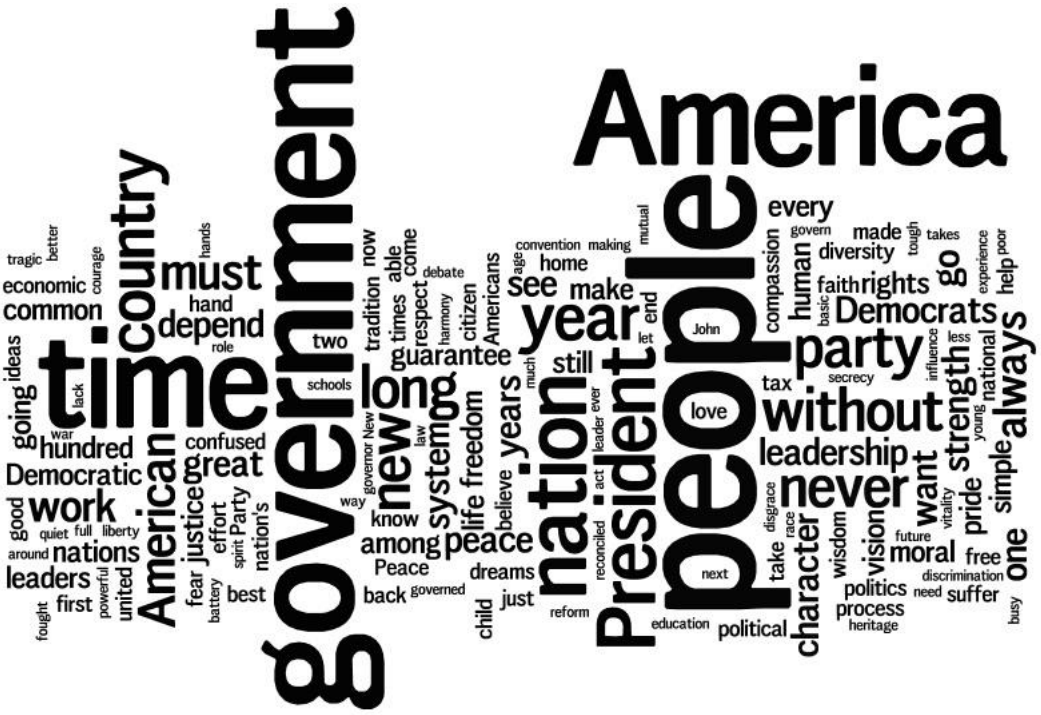
2.1 Nixon's Nomination Acceptance Speech



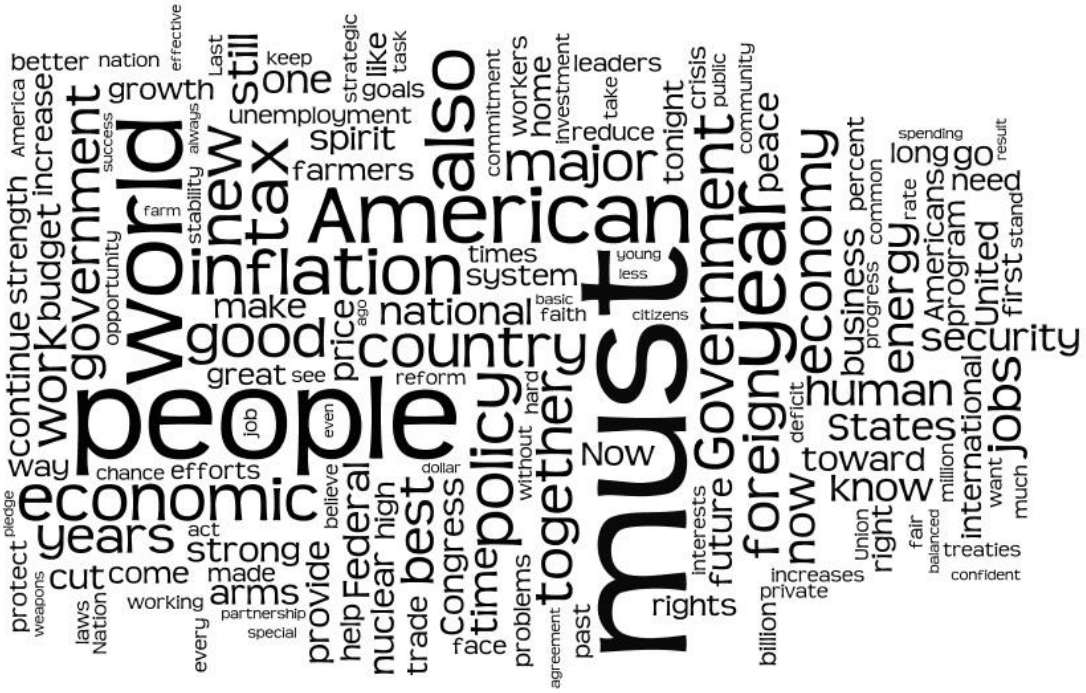
2.2 Nixon's Victory Speech

2.3 Nixon's State of the Union Address

3.1 Carter's Nomination Acceptance Speech


America
people
government
time
country
President
nation
party
year
Democrats
without
never
leadership
character
must
depend
hand
common
economic
hundred
confused
great
Democratic
work
American
justice
leaders
nations
long
new
system
among
peace
Peace
dreams
guarantee
still
years
life
freedom
believe
rights
faith
diversity
made
every
human
compassion
tax
love
strength
pride
want
always
simple
one
moral
vision
politics
process
suffer
need
discrimination
free
future
wisdom
take
disgrace
race
secrecy
home
see
make
Americans
citizen
respect
tradition
two
hands
courage
tragic
better
ideas
going
lack
schools
hands
role
depend
fear
effort
best
battery
Party
nation's
spirit
united
powerful
first
fought
around
quiet
full
liberty
good
work
war
Democratic
hundred
confused
great
justice
American
leaders
nations
fear
effort
spirit
Party
nation's
best
battery
united
powerful
first
fought
quiet
full
liberty
around
good
work
going
ideas
lack
schools
war
hundred
Democratic

3.3 Carter's First State of the Union Address



4.1 Reagan's Nomination Acceptance Speech

4.2 Reagan's Victory Speech

4.3 Reagan's First State of the Union Address

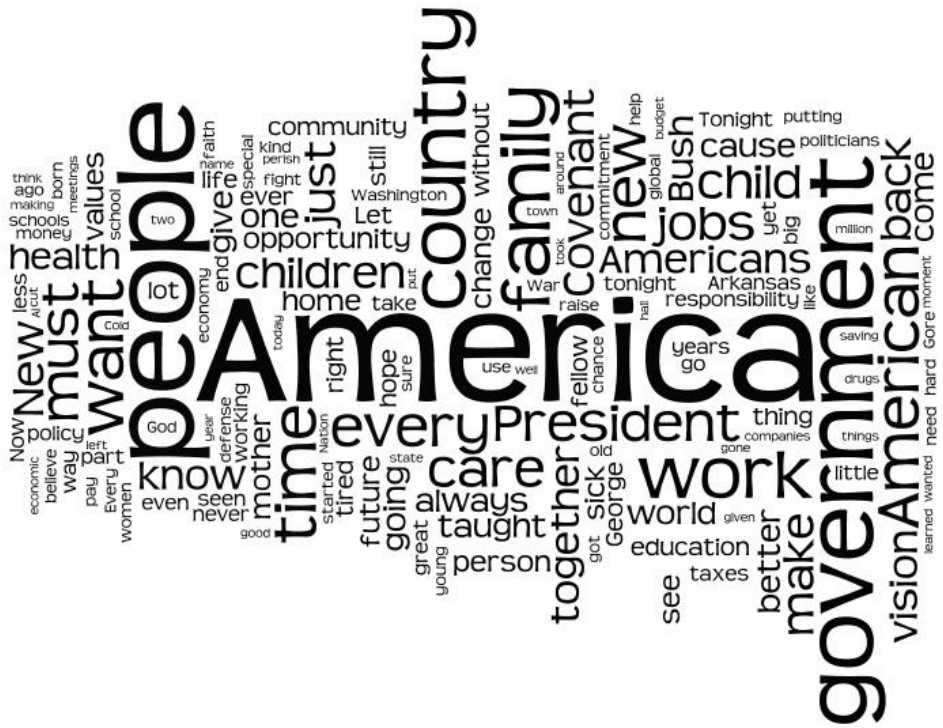
5.1 Bush 41's Nomination Acceptance Speech

5.2 Bush 41's Victory Speech

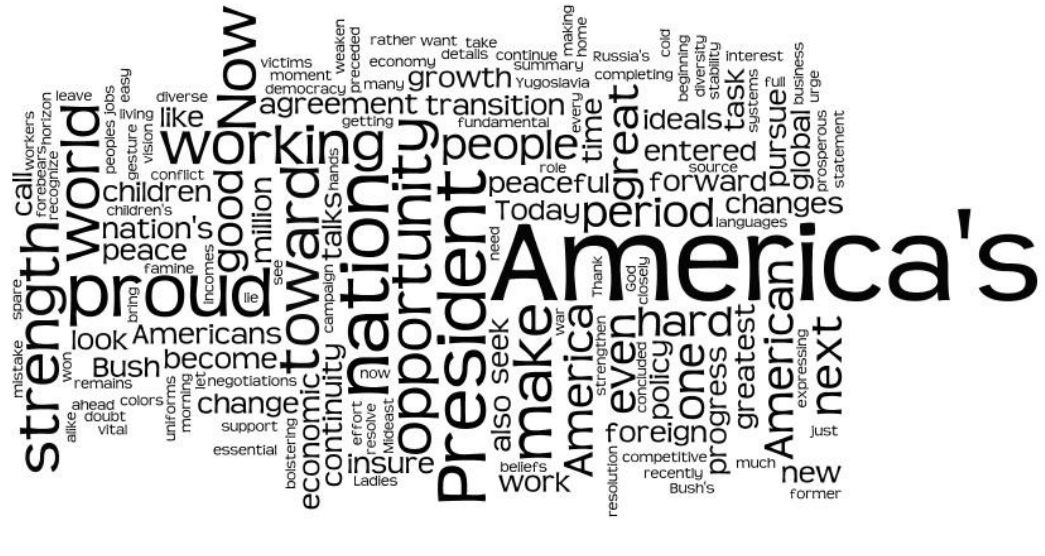

thank
want
great
people
mean
now
America
God
politics
presidents
always
campaign
family
work
keep
men
United
years
hopes
started
friend
know
Governor
going
personal
New
democracy
thing
come
strength
country
telephone
time
States
faith
Thank
many
harmony
conversation
friendship
take
lost
talk
Bush
victory
night
bless
given
door
decision
never
just
way
one
Texas
congress
try
hands
women
Barbara
Dukakis
Never
need
endorses
words
peace
boro
business
banks
Another
talking
worked
trust
Ronald
offer
moving
Washington
without
hearted
campaigned
recognize
Reagan
Now
left
disagreements
fire
feels
divide
little
hard
Lady
days
young
fact
grow
Fire
final
homecoming
darker
supporters
much
signs
Losing
nation
valiant
genuinely
4/30/2015
occurred
life
call
received
Kara
away
Quayle's
turning
hand
mile
element
ask
oldest
miles
guess
source
hustings
people.html
right
man's
Andrea
cold
throughout
Baker
promise
bracing
think
moved
worthy
especially
supported
sometimes
feelings
full
putting
long
anymore
God's
First
back
Texas
helped
Governor
Washington
Ronald
Reagan
Now
left
campaigned
recognize
hearted
disagreements
fire
feels
divide
little
hard
Lady
days
young
fact
grow
Fire
final
homecoming
darker
supporters
much
signs
Losing
nation
valiant
genuinely
4/30/2015
occurred
life
call
received
Kara
away
Quayle's
turning
hand
mile
element
ask
oldest
miles
guess
source
hustings
people.html
right
man's
Andrea
cold
throughout
Baker
promise
bracing
think
moved
worthy
especially
supported
sometimes
feelings
full
putting
long
anymore
God's
First
back
Texas
helped
Governor
Washington
Ronald
Reagan
Now
left

5.3 Bush 41's First State of the Union Address

6.1 Clinton's Nomination Acceptance Speech



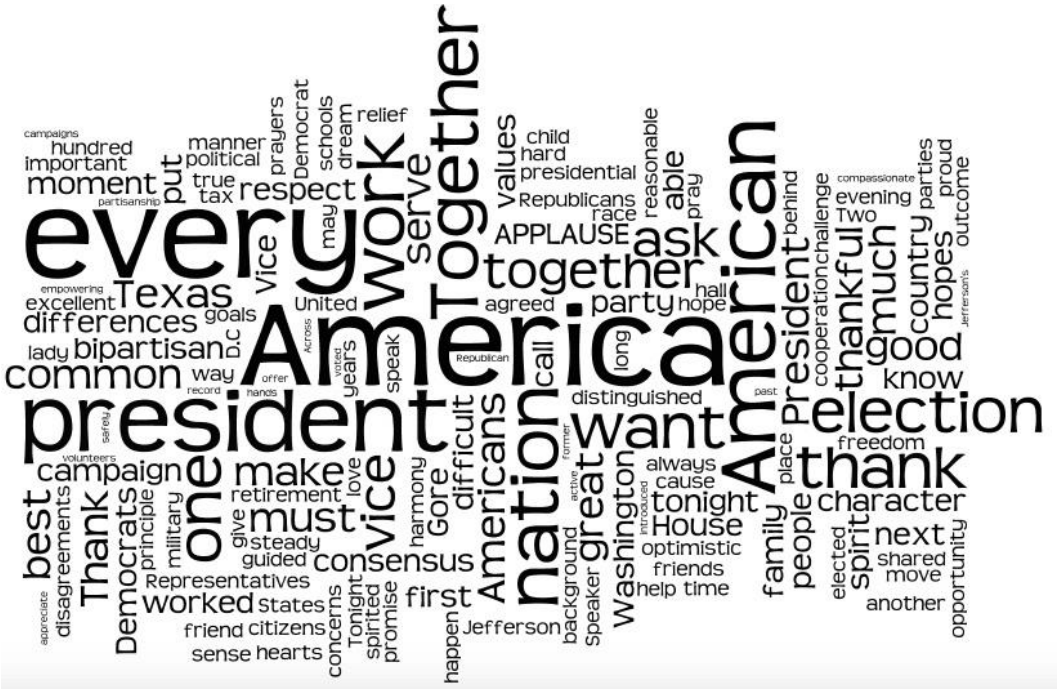
6.2 Clinton's Victory Speech



6.3 Clinton's First State of the Union Address

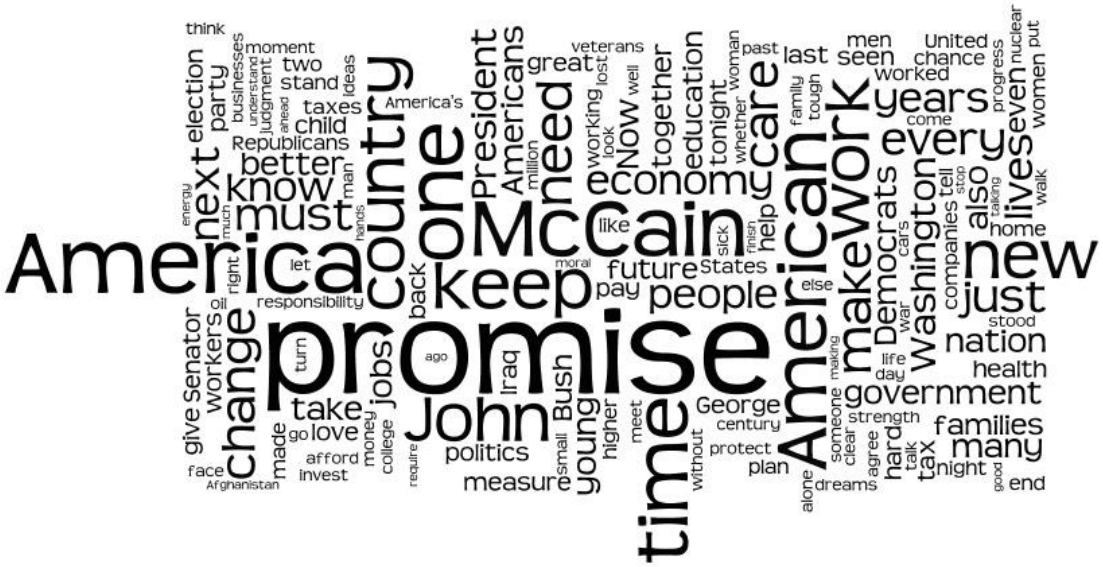
7.1 Bush 43's Nomination Acceptance Speech

7.2 Bush 43's Victory Speech



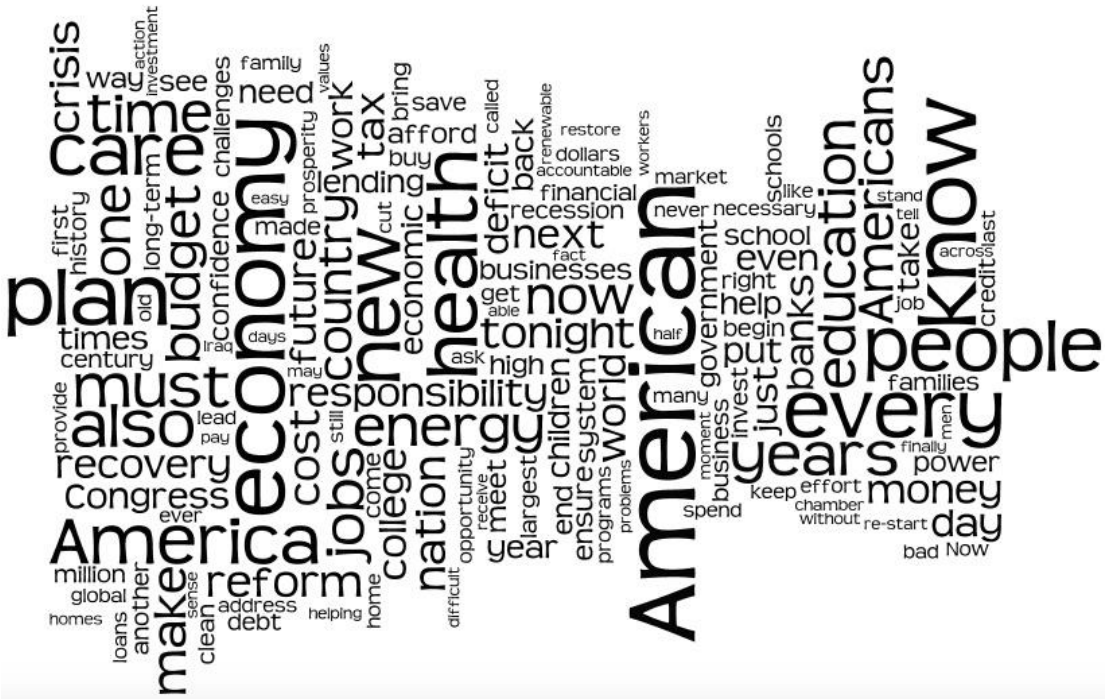
7.3 Bush 43's First State of the Union Address

8.1 Obama's Nomination Acceptance Speech



8.2 Obama's Victory Speech

8.3 Obama's First State of the Union Address


economy
American
people
know
every
America
plan
health
time
care
crisis
energy
education
Americans
must
also
jobs
new
now
tonight
responsibility
budget
one
need
work
tax
country
future
deficit
next
businesses
financial
recession
banks
government
school
even
right
help
put
just
years
money
day
power
reform
make
recovery
Congress
nation
college
children
world
system
ensure
programs
spend
effort
keep
chamber
without
re-start
bad
Now
finally
take
stand
tell
job
credit
last
across
families
schools
like
never
necessary
market
workers
restore
dollars
accountable
renewable
called
back
afford
save
bring
buy
lending
economic
cut
prosperity
values
family
see
way
action
investment
challenges
confidence
made
easy
long-term
first
history
old
provide
lead
pay
still
cost
jobs
come
meet
largest
year
end
opportunity
receive
difficult
home
helping
address
debt
clean
sense
another
loans
homes
million
global
days
Iraq
may
ask
high
fact
half
begin
invest
business
moment
many
programs
problems
ever
Congress
recovery
also
must
century
times
plan
care
time
crisis
economy
America
reform
make
energy
health
tonight
now
next
businesses
financial
recession
deficit
back
afford
save
bring
buy
lending
economic
cut
prosperity
values
family
need
work
tax
country
future

APPENDIX B

Chart 1 Percentages of Speeches that Mention Congress

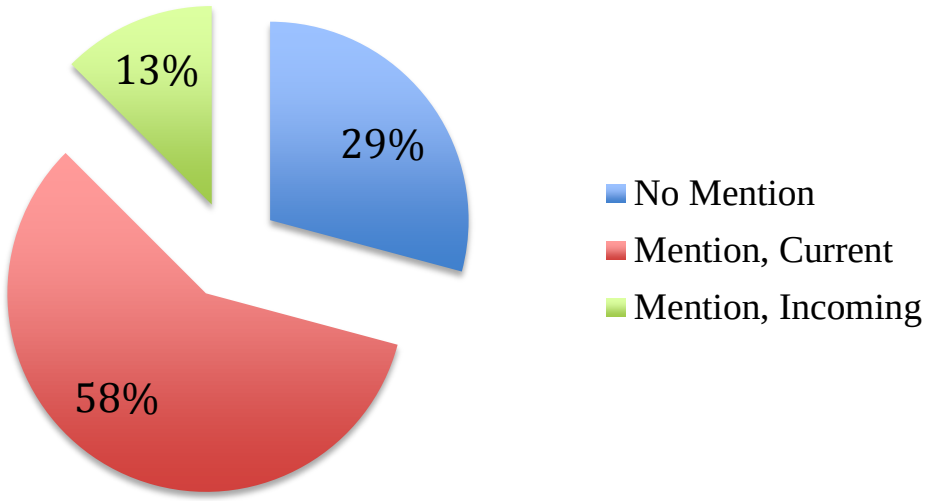


Chart 2 Speech Tone When Mentioning Congress

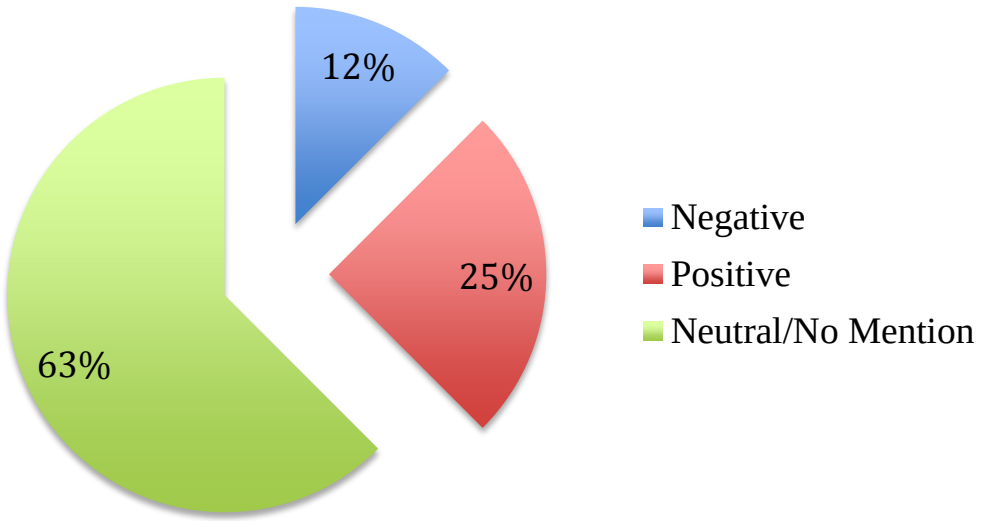


Chart 3 Mentions of Previous Administration

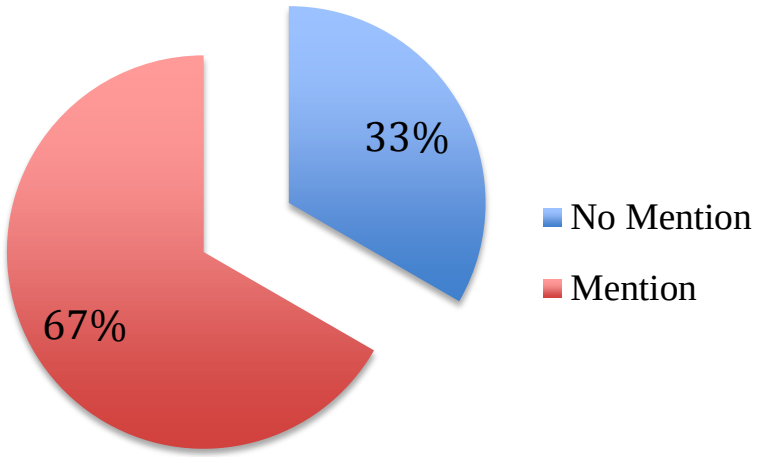
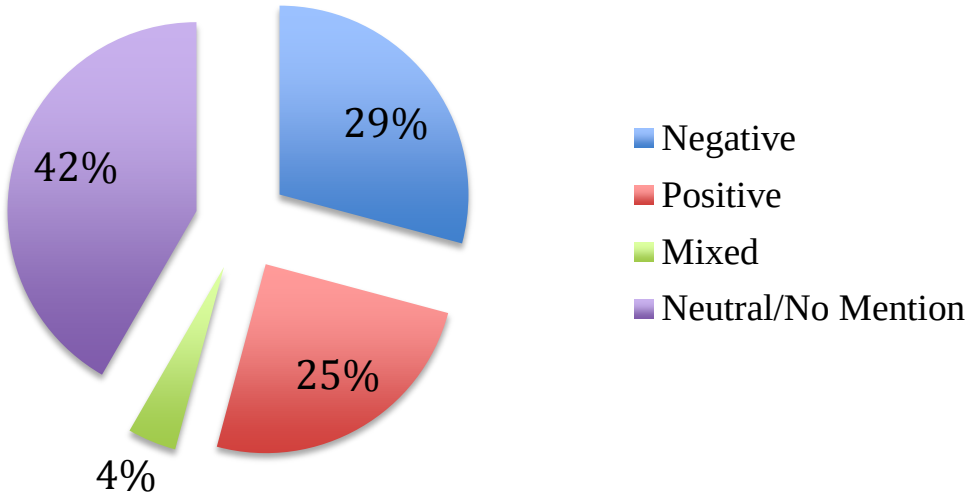


Chart 4 Tone When Mentioning Previous Administration



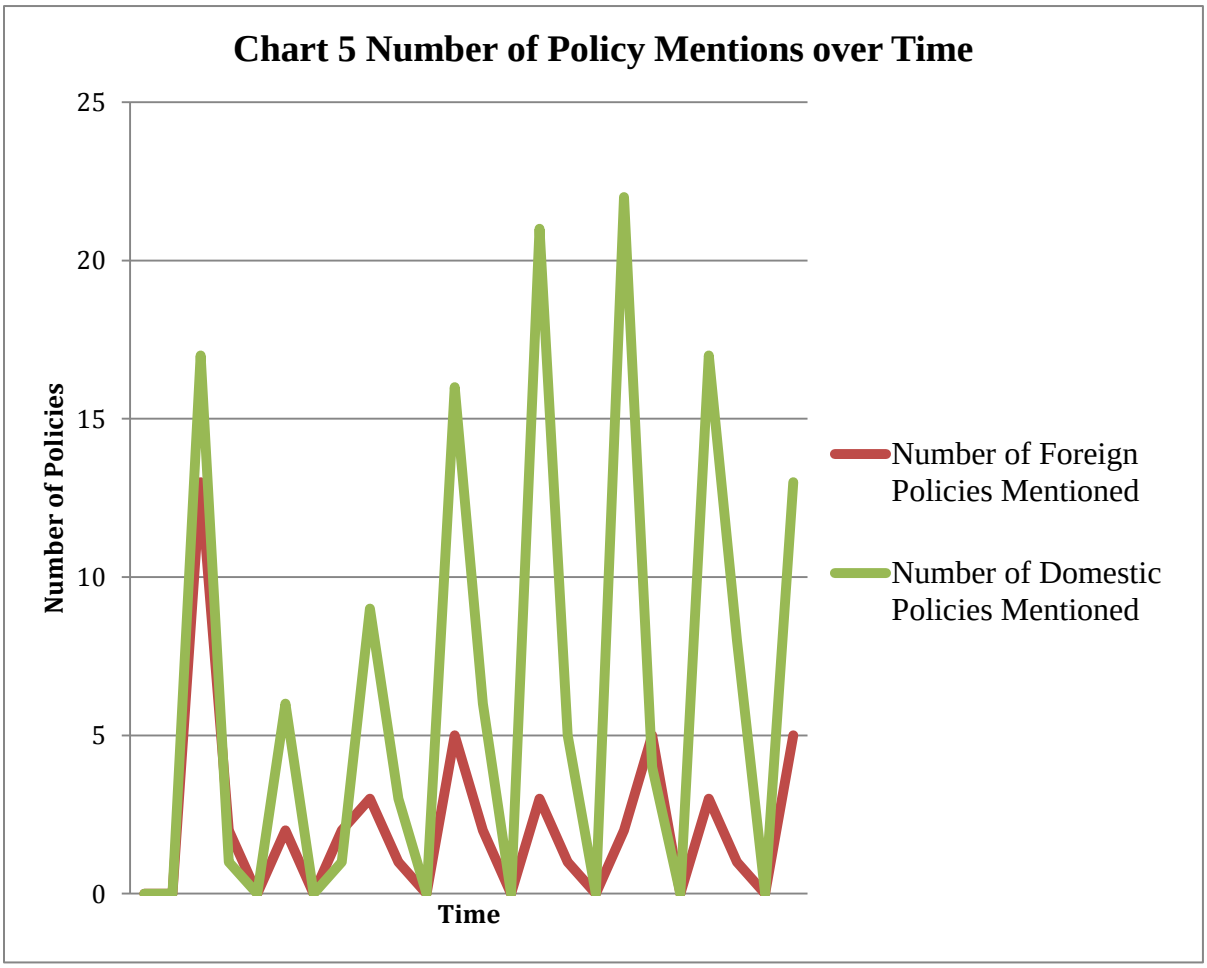


Chart 5 Number of Policy Mentions over Time
25
20
15
10
5
0
Number of Policies
Time
Number of Foreign Policies Mentioned
Number of Domestic Policies Mentioned

Chart 6 Comparison of Policy Mentions

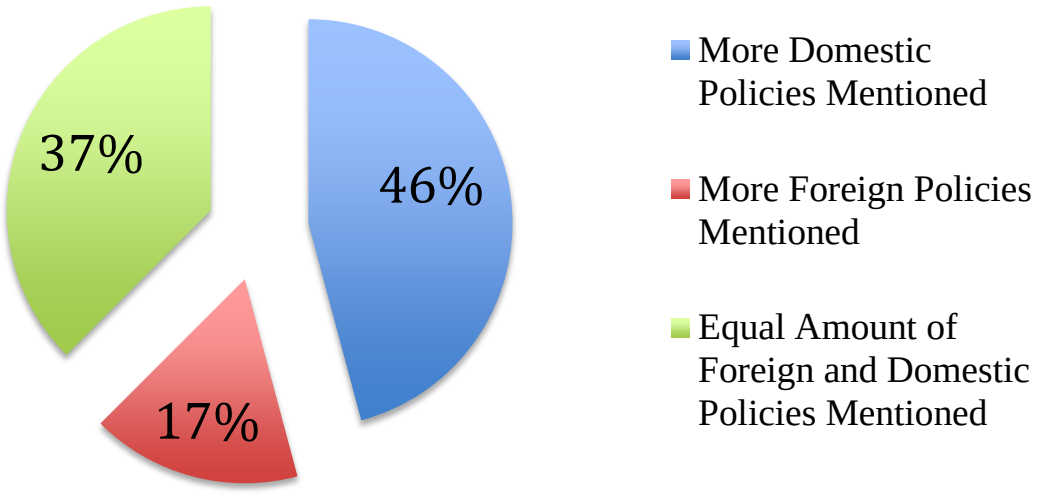
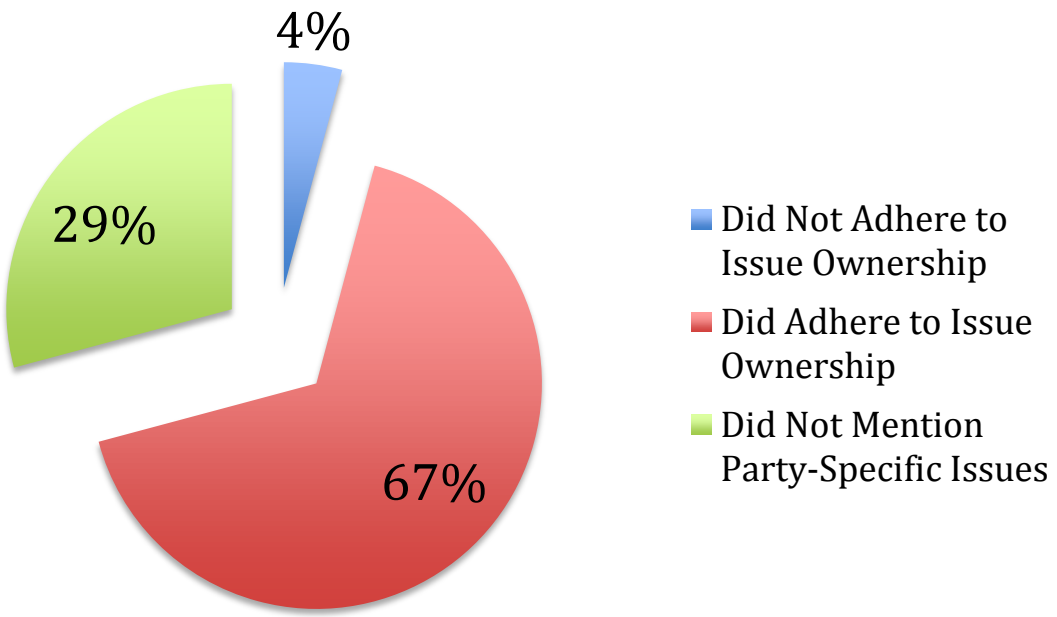


Chart 7 Issue Ownership



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Burke, J. (2001). Lessons from Past Presidential Transitions: Organization, Management, and Decision Making. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 5-24.

Burke, J. P. (2009). The Contemporary Presidency: The Obama Presidential Transition An Early Assessment. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 39* (3), 574-604.

Bush, G. (1988, August 18). Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention. New Orleans, Louisiana, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Bush, G. (1988, November 8). Bush Victory Talk: 'I Mean to Be a President of All the People'. Houston, Texas, United States of America: New York Times.

Bush, G. (1989, February 9). State of the Union Address. Washington, D.C., United States of America.

Bush, G. W. (2000, August 3). Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Bush, G. W. (2000, December 13). Address in Austin Accepting Election as the 43rd President of the United States. Austin, Texas, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Bush, G. W. (2001, February 27). State of the Union Address. Washington, D.C., United States of America.

Carter, J. (1976, July 15). Our Nation's Past and Future. *Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention* . New York City, New York, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Carter, J. (1978, January 19). The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress. Washington, D.C., United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Carter, J. (1976, November 4). Victory Speech. Plains, Georgia, United States of America: New York Times.

Ceaser, J. W., Thurow, G. E., Tulis, J., & Bessette, J. M. (1981). The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency. *Presidential Studies Quarterly , 11* (2), 158-171.

Clinton, W. J. (1992, July 16). Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention. New York, New York, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Clinton, W. J. (1993, February 17). Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals. Washington, D.C., United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Clinton, W. J. (1992, November 4). Excerpts of Remarks in Little Rock. Little Rock, Arkansas, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Crothers, A. L. (1994). Asserting Dominance: Presidential Transitions from Out-Party to In-Party, 1932-1992. *Polity , 26* (4), 793-814.

Hart, R. P., Childers, J. P., & Lind, C. J. (2013). *Political Tone: How Leaders Talk & Why.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kennedy, J. F. (1960, November 9). Acceptance Speech. Hyannis, Massachusetts, United States of America: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

Kennedy, J. F. (1961, January 30). Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union. Washington, D.C., United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Kennedy, J. F. (1960, July 15). Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States. Los Angeles, California, United States of America: American Presidency Project.

Kumar, M. J. (2008). Getting Ready for Day One: Taking Advantage of the Opportunities and Minimizing the Hazards of a Presidential Transition. *Public Administration Review, 68* (4), 603-617.

Kumar, M. J., Edwards, G. C., Pfiffner, J. P., & Sullivan, T. (2000). The Contemporary Presidency Meeting the Freight Train Head On: Planning for the Transition to Power. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 30* (4), 754-769.

Lovvorn, A. S., & Walker, W. E. (2011). Assessing a Presidential Transition: Bill Clinton's Inaugural Year. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 21* (2), 188-197.

Nelson, M., & Riley, R. L. (2010). *The President's Words: Speeches and Speechwriting in the Modern White House.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Neustadt, R. E. (1990). *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership From Roosevelt to Reagan.* New York: Collier Macmillian Canada.

Nixon, R. (1968, August 8). Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention. Miami, Florida, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Nixon, R. (1970, January 22). Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union. Washington, D.C., United States of America: American Presidency Project.

Nixon, R. (1968, November 6). Victory Speech. New York, New York, United States of America: Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

Obama, B. (2009, February 24). State of the Union Address. Washington, D.C., United States of America: State of the Union Address Library.

Obama, B. (2008, August 28). The American Promise. Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Denver: "The American Promise". Denver, Colorado, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Obama, B. (2008, November 8). Victory Speech. Chicago, Illinois, United States of America: The Telegraph.

Olson, J., Ouyang, Y., Poe, J., Trantham, A., & Waterman, R. W. (2012). The Teleprompter Presidency: Comparing Obama's Campaign and Governing Rhetoric. *Social Science Quarterly, 93* (5), 1402-1423.

Reagan, R. (1980, July 17). Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention. Detroit, Michigan, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Reagan, R. (1982, January 26). Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union. Washington, D.C., United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Reagan, R. (1980, November 4). Election Night Victory Speech. Los Angeles, California, United States of America: The American Presidency Project.

Smith, C. A. (2010). *Presidential Campaign Communication The Quest for the White House.* Malden: Polity Press.

Stromback, J., & Kiousis, S. (2011). *Political Public Relations.* New York: Routledge.

Stuckey, M. E. (2010). Rethinking the Rhetorical Presidency and Presidential Rhetoric. *Review of Communication, 10* (1), 38-52.

Stuckey, M. (1992). Legitimating Leadership: The Rhetoric of Succession as a Genre of Presidential Discourse. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 22* (2), 25-38.

Tulis, J. (1987). *The Rhetorical Presidency.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Walker, W. E., & Reopel, M. R. (1986). Strategies for Governance: Transitions and Domestic Policymaking in the Reagan Administration. *Presidential Studies Quarterly, 16* (4), 734-760.

VITA

My name is Donald “Trey” Moore III, and this paper is my Honors Thesis for Angelo State University. I grew up in Colleyville, Texas with my parents and brother. I began attending ASU in the fall of 2011. I majored in political science, with a pre-law focus. I met my fiancée through the Honors Program. At Angelo State, I was selected for the 2013-2014 Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress Presidential Fellow program, attended the 2013 Air Force Academy Assembly, and presented elements of this research at the National Collegiate Honors Council conference. I was involved in several honors societies, and was the Department of Political Science and Philosophy nominee for the ASU 2015 Presidential Award. After graduating summa cum laude, I will be attending the Baylor School of Law to obtain a law degree. After law school, I plan on pursuing a career as a corporate lawyer.

Any questions or comments regarding the paper or the topic in general can be sent to treymoore117@gmail.com.